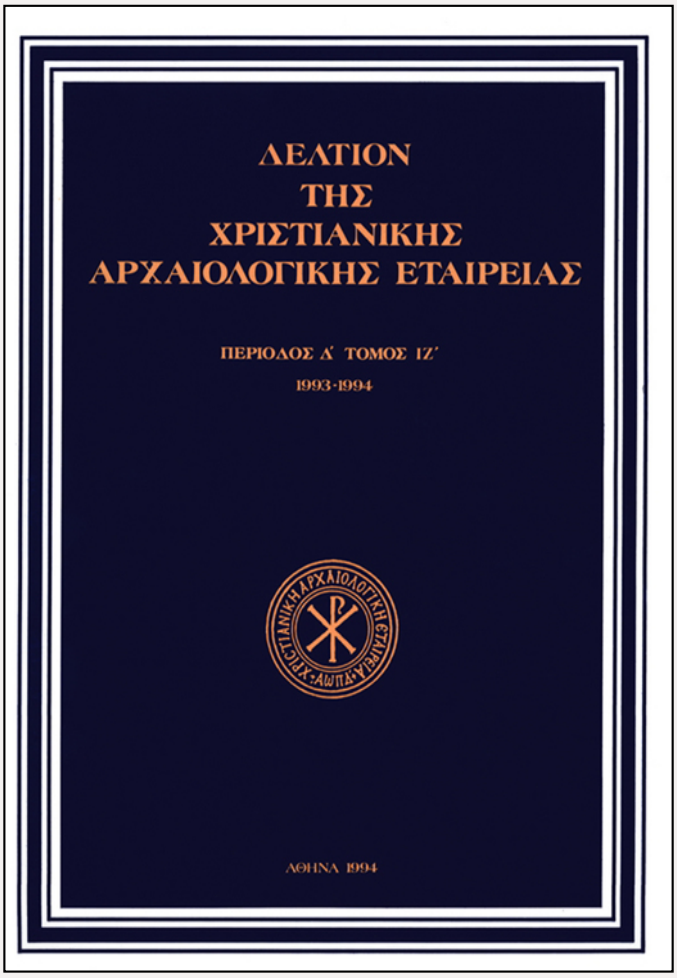
ePublishing

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΤΕΚΜΗΡΙΩΣΗΣ
EKT NATIONAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας

Τομ. 17, 1994



Η απεικόνιση δωρητών και αγίων σε τέσσερις βυζαντινές εικόνες

PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO
Nancy
https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.1100

Copyright © 1994

CC BY NC SA

To cite this article:

PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO, N. (1994). Η απεικόνιση δωρητών και αγίων σε τέσσερις βυζαντινές εικόνες. *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας, 17*, 157-164. doi:https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.1100

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 23/03/2020 07:31:13 |

ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

The Representation of Donors and Holy Figures on four Byzantine Icons

Nancy PATTERSON ŠEVČENKO

Δελτίον ΧΑΕ 17 (1993-1994), Περίοδος Δ'. Στη μνήμη της Ντούλας Μουρίκη (1934-1991)• Σελ. 157-164

ΑΘΗΝΑ 1994

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΤΕΚΜΗΡΙΩΣΗΣ
NATIONAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE
e-Publishing

www.deltionchae.org

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 23/03/2020 07:31:13 |

Nancy Patterson Ševčenko

THE REPRESENTATION OF DONORS AND HOLY FIGURES ON FOUR BYZANTINE ICONS

Byzantine images of donation and dedication exist in virtually every medium. Thanks to the studies of Tanya Velmans and Hans Belting on late monumental painting and manuscripts, interest has focussed recently on donor images of the Palaiologan period; the book of Sophia Kalopissi-Verti now brings renewed attention to fresco works of the 13th century[1]. In this note I will deal with donor images on icons only, in honor of Doula Mouriki's outstanding studies of Byzantine icons which form such a significant part of her scholarly œuvre.

An icon of St. Irene on Mount Sinai, dated by Kurt Weitzmann to the 8th-9th century (Fig. 1) shows two features that generally distinguish icons from donor compositions in other media: the utter obliviousness of the towering saint to the presence of the donor at his feet, and the fact that the donor is not carrying any sort of gift[2]. Elsewhere, the holy figure is more responsive: in monumental painting, the donor, bearing a church model, may be ushered by a saint into the presence of Christ or the Virgin, who acknowledges his gift with a wave of the hand; in manuscript painting, the donor offers a book to a holy figure, usually the Virgin, who alerts Christ in the arc of heaven above, and Christ gestures back down in recognition[3].

On an icon, the image we see does not merely record a larger commission — a fresco program or illustrated book — or reenact the donation; it is both a commemoration of the gift and the very gift itself. The holy figure painted on the panel must therefore be able to maintain its integrity as a devotional image despite the presence of the donor. Hence the remoteness we have noted, the spiritual distance between image and donor which we find especially on icons. If the saint is depicted in motion — a holy rider, say, or Moses in the act of receiving the law — the saint's aloofness to the donor beneath his feet or beneath the thundering hooves of his steed can almost reach comic proportions[4].

Some 13th century icons on Mount Sinai, such as the one commissioned by a monk-priest by the name of John (Fig. 2), differ from that of Irene not only in that the donor stands upright close by the image of St. George and addresses his prayer to the saint with outstretched arms, but also in that saint and donor are now surrounded by a sequence of narrative panels illustrating the life of St. George, twenty scenes which form a frame around the central image[5]. The distinction between central panel and frame that evolved over the course of the 12th and 13th centuries may be connected with the Comnenian practice of rejuvenating and adorning older panels by applying new silver revetments, or "periphereia" to them[6]. A portrait of a donor may now be commemorating this kind of secondary gift — not the creation of the central panel, but its later adornment — and even be relegated to the frame, which further inten-

1. T. Velmans, Le portrait dans l'art des Paléologues, and H. Belting, Die Auftraggeber der spätbyzantinischen Bildhandschrift, both in: Art et Societé à Byzance sous les Paléologues, Venice 1971, p. 93-148 and 151-176 respectively T. Velmans, La peinture murale byzantine à la fin du mogen âge, Paris 1977. H. Belting, Das illuminierte Buch in der spätbyzantinischen Gesellschaft, Heidelberg 1970, and idem, Bild und Kult, Munich 1991, *passim*. Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits in Thirteenth-Century Churches of Greece, Vienna 1992. See also I. Spatharakis, The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts, Leiden 1976. A. and J. Stylianou, Donors and Dedicatory Inscriptions, Supplicants and Supplications in the Painted Churches of Cyprus, JÖBG 9 (1960), p. 97-128. M. Tatić-Djurić, Iconographie de la donation dans l'ancien art serbe, Actes du XIV Congrès International des études byzantines, Bucarest 1971, III, p. 311-322, and A. Cutler, Proskynesis, in his: Transfigurations: Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography, University Park, Penn. and London 1975. I have also profitted from discussions with several generous colleagues, especially Henry Maguire and Natalia Teteriatnikov.

2. G. and M. Soteriou, Εἰκόνες τῆς μονῆς Σινᾶ, Athens 1958, fig. 32. K. Weitzmann, The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Icons. Volume One: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century, Princeton 1976, no. B39. The icon measures 39 × 25 cm. The donor figure often occupies the position of a dedicatory inscription: cf. the 13th century icon of Moses receiving the law, Soteriou, *op.cit.*, fig. 75 or that of St. Prokopios, also on Mount Sinai, D. Mouriki, Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons by the Painter Peter, Studenica et l'art byzantin autour de l'année 1200, Belgrade 1988, esp. p. 343-344, fig. 5.

3. See N. P. Ševčenko, Les rapports entre fidèles et figures saintes à l'intérieur des images, in: Byzance et les images, with further bibliography (in press).

4. Cf. the icon of Sts. George and Theodore on Sinai galloping over George "of Paris," K. Weitzmann *et al.*, The Icon, New York 1982, p. 220, or St. Michael or Moses nearly treading some donors underfoot, Soteriou, *op.cit.*, figs 159, 161, and D. Mouriki, A Moses Cycle on a Sinai Icon of the Early Thirteenth Century, Byzantine East, Latin West. Art Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann (in press).

5. Soteriou, *op.cit.*, fig. 167. K. Weitzmann, The Icon. Holy Images - Sixth to Fourteenth Century, New York 1978, pl. 34. The icon measures 127 × 78,5 cm.

6. See N. P. Ševčenko, Vita Icons and "Decorated" Icons of the Komnenian Period, Four Icons in the Menil Collection, ed. B. Davezac (= The Menil Collection Monographs 1), Houston 1992, p. 57-69.

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 23/03/2020 07:31:13 |

sifies the donor's remoteness from the holy figure[7]. On a late 13th century icon in Moscow with the portraits of Constantine Akropolites and his wife Maria (Fig. 3), the separation of the central panel from the frame is complete, and the silver-gilt figures of the donors now appear to be recording their benefaction to the particular painted image of the Virgin Hodegetria seen in the central panel, rather than appealing directly to an awesome holy figure, as was the case when the donor was represented crouched at his very feet[8].

There are, however, certain Byzantine icons which diverge from these traditional icon formulae, and attempt to represent the holy image on the panel actually responding to the presence of the donor; it is to four of these icons that this paper is dedicated. One is the famous 13th century Vita icon of St. George from Kastoria, now in the Byzantine Museum in Athens (Fig. 4)[9]. Here we see a carved and painted standing figure of St. George, in 3/4 view and in full military attire, praying up to Christ, who listens eagerly from the arc of heaven at the upper right. An inscription, by now virtually illegible, fills the area before the saint, and behind him, on the ground at the left, is the tiny figure of a donor. The figure kneels in proskynesis, and wears long dark robes adorned with fur strips over the shoulders, and a black hood. The combination of garments rules out our identifying this figure as a monk or nun in a monastic hood or koukoulion; the fur trim suggests rather that the donor is a lady of some rank, and that the "hood" is a mourning veil such as that donned at the moment of her husband's death by Irene Dukaina, wife of emperor Alexios I, or that worn by the lady who clasps the foot of the mounted St. Sergios on a Crusader icon on Mount Sinai, or that of the Romanian Princess Militsa after the death of her son, on a 16th-century icon she commissioned[10]. On the back of the icon are painted two standing female saints, Sts. Marina and Irene(?), who raise a joint prayer to Christ above.

The saint on this icon is not an oblivious frontal figure, but one who actively attempts to mediate with Christ. This kind of intercessory composition is extremely rare on icons, although the ingredients are all Byzantine. Some contemporary panels show a standing profile saint

Fig. 1. Icon of Saint Irene with the donor Nicholas (Sab)atianos. Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine. (Published through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai).

7. On a 13th century Moses icon on Mount Sinai where a donor crouches on the painted frame (Soteriou, *op.cit.*, fig. 160), cf. D. Mouriki, A Pair of Early 13th-Century Moses Icons at Sinai with the Scenes of the Burning Bush and the Receiving of the Law, ΔΧΑΕ Δ΄, ΙΣΤ΄ (1992), p. 171-184.

8. A. Grabar, Les revêtments en or et en argent des icones byzantines du moyen âge, Venice 1975, no. 18.

9. K. Weitzmann *et al.*, The Icon (as in note 5 above), pl. 35. G. Sotiriou, La sculpture sur bois dans l'art byzantin, Mélanges Charles Diehl, Paris 1930, II, p. 178-180, fig. 4. R. Lange, Die byzantinische Reliefikone, Recklinghausen 1964, no. 49. The icon measures 109 × 72 cm. I take this occasion to thank Dr. Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou for kindly discussing this icon with me, and for permitting me to photograph it. She herself will be publishing a more thorough study of this icon.

10. According to Anna Comnena, Irene "laid aside her empress's veil and with a razor cut off her lovely hair close to the skin. She threw away the purple-dyed shoes she was wearing and asked for ordinary black sandals. But when she wanted to exchange her purple dress for a black one, no garment of that kind could readily be found. However, my third sister had clothes appropriate to the occasion (she had long before suffered widowhood herself) and the empress accepted these and wore them. She put a simple dark veil on her head. Meanwhile the emperor surrendered to God his holy soul...", Anna Comnena, The Alexiad, Book XV:11, trans. Sewter, p. 513. Sergios icon: Sotiriou, *op.cit.*, fig. 187; Lucy Anne Hunt, A Woman's Prayer to St. Sergios in Latin Syria: Interpreting a Thirteenth-Century Icon at Mount Sinai, BMGS 15 (1991), p. 96-145. Romanian icon: M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, ed., Εικόνες της Ρουμανίας, Romanian Icons (Exhibition Catalogue, Byzantine Museum, Athens 1993), no. 5.

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 23/03/2020 07:31:13 |

Fig. 2. Icon of Saint George with scenes from his life and a donor, the monk and priest John. Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine. (Published through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai).

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 23/03/2020 07:31:13 |

praying to Christ, though none of these includes the figure of a donor[11], and there are 11th and 12th century manuscript compositions showing the Virgin as advocate mediating between the donor and Christ[12]. The carved image of St. George reminds us of the huge wooden sculpture-icon or *xoanon* (2.90 meters tall) in the church of St. George at Omorphokklesia near Kastoria[13].

Unlike the manuscript Virgins, however, and like the earlier icons, St. George remains aloof from the donor he is apparently representing; he is absorbed in his own dialogue with Christ. The two figures, donor and saint, are separated in other ways as well: though the donor is painted onto the central panel, as is Christ, George himself is carved in relief. It is possible to argue that it was not on her own behalf that this lady commissioned the icon, but on behalf of her dead husband. The scenario could be reconstructed thus: a certain lady with connections to Kastoria and with particular affection for Sts. Marina and Irene, lost her husband (a soldier?) and commissioned on his behalf an icon of St. George. For the figure of the saint, she used a specific local image, a *xoanon;* this miraculous image she put to work, so to speak, making it turn and pray to Christ on behalf of her dead spouse; she then "adorned" the image with a narrative frame and inserted her portrait as donor. She herself does not expect a response from George: he is there to intercede for her husband. Her own personal protectors and intercessors are the two female saints on the back.

Another icon that could be read as showing a saint actually responding to the plea of a specific donor is a curious 12th century icon on Sinai (Fig. 5)[14]. Here again we encounter a near profile figure of St. George, hands raised in prayer to Christ. But this time George is interceding for someone virtually his equal in size, namely a Georgian king of the Bagratid dynasty[15]. As on the manuscript pages which show the mediating words of the Virgin, and as (presumably) on the Athens icon, St. George's words on behalf of the king are written in gold letters in the space between the figures[16]. But there is no longer a natural progression from a small prostrate donor through a large saint to Christ in the arc of heaven at the upper corner, as in the traditional formula; instead there is a symmetrical pairing of the two figures, king and saint, with Christ in the centre hovering over both their heads. The composition evokes that of a coronation, or the headpiece of a chrysobull, wherein Christ confirms the authority of the emperor, more than it does a traditional donor composition. And there are other oddities: George turns on axis to direct a prayer to Christ and to assert his role as an intermediary, but meanwhile Christ is seen communicating with the king directly: he looks back over his shoulder at George, but his right hand stretches out to the frontal king. St. George, though depicted as intercessor, is actually somewhat superfluous in this composition: the royal figure is apparently capable of receiving Christ's response to the saint's entreaty without the need of an intermediary.

This is of course the hope of any donor, whatever his rank: to evoke from Christ an explicit response to his prayer or gift. On a tiny 14th century icon on Mount Sinai of the Virgin with her parents Joachim and Anna we find another rare attempt to show the response as well as the donor's appeal (Fig. 6)[17]. Here a monk is shown kneeling at the feet of the standing Virgin, who gestures toward him with her right hand. Christ, whom she holds in her left arm, also addresses him with both gesture and glance. Joachim and Anna flank the Virgin

11. E.g. the large late 12th-early 13th century mosaic icons of George and Demetrios in the Xenophontos monastery on Mount Athos, or the icon of St. Euthymios on Sinai, who prays to a bust of the Virgin and Child: O. Demus, Die byzantinischen Mosaikikonen, Vienna 1991, no. 4; K. Weitzmann - M. Chatzidakis - K. Miatev - S. Radojčić, A Treasury of Icons. Sixth to Seventeenth Centuries, New York 1966, p. 24. Cf. also the figure of the praying Theodore Tyron (who has lost his companion Stratelatis), on a 14th century icon in the monastery of Chilandari, D. Bogdanović - V. Djurić - D. Medaković, Hilandar, Belgrade 1978, p. 128, fig. 77.

12. S. Der Nersessian, Two Images of the Virgin in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, DOP 14 (1960), esp. p. 84-85. N. P. Ševčenko, Rapports (as in note 3). The formula with the Virgin as advocate appears very rarely in monumental painting; one example is the donation mosaic of George of Antioch in the Martorana church in Palermo, for which see E. Kitzinger, The Mosaics of St. Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo, Washington, D.C. 1990, and his pertinent comments p. 197-206. In a fresco in the crypt of Hosios Loukas, a standing monk appeals to Hosios Loukas, who transmits the appeal to Christ, C. Connor, Art and Miracles in Medieval Byzantium. The Crypt at Hosios Loukas and its Frescoes, Princeton 1991, fig. 82.

13. On the church, see Kalopissi-Verti, Dedicatory Inscriptions (as in note 1 above), p. 48-49, with earlier bibliography. On the wooden icon, see Soteriou, Sculpture (as in note 9 above).

14. Soteriou, *op.cit.*, fig. 152. The icon measures 65 × 49 cm.

15. The Greek words on the upper right of the icon call the figure "..., faithful king of the whole East, Pankratounianos" but of his first name only one letter remains to the left of the king's head; it is read by some as a Greek G, by others as a Georgian D. The identity of the king has been discussed most recently by D. K'ldiašvili, L'icône de Saint Georges du Mont Sinai avec la portrait de Davit Aymasenebeli, Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes 5 (1989), p. 107-128; the author proposes David the builder (1089-1125).

16. For a transcription, see V. N. Benešević, Izobraženie gružinskogo carja Davida Stroitelja na ikone Sinaijskogo monastyrija, Hristianskij vostok 1 (1912), p. 64.

17. Soteriou, *op.cit.*, fig. 164. D. Mouriki, Ἡ Παναγία καί οἱ θεοπατόρες: Ἀφηγηματική σκηνή ἤ εἰκονιστική παράσταση, ΔΧΑΕ Δ΄, Ε΄ (1969), pl. 29α. The icon measures 33 × 25 cm.

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 23/03/2020 07:31:13 |

Fig. 3. Icon of the Virgin Hodegetria with the donors Constantine and Maria Akropolites on its metal frame. Moscow, Tretjakov Gallery.

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 23/03/2020 07:31:13 |

Fig. 4. Icon of Saint George with scenes from his life and a female donor. Athens, Byzantine Museum.

Fig. 5. Icon of Saint George and a Bagratid king. Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine. (Published through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai).

in a sort of modified Deesis, and they also point down, both of them, toward the donor. The core of the composition, the figure of the Virgin with child acknowledging a donor at her feet, is found in frescoes and manuscripts from 11th century on, but is to my knowledge unique on Byzantine icons[18]. The donor has in this case actually altered the nature of the whole image, by demanding a visual response from the very holy figures he has commissioned.

One final icon at first glance appears to take this involvement one step further still, not only introducing a donor into an actual Biblical event but even depicting Christ stepping out of the action to acknowledge the donor's presence. In the Metamorphosis monastery of Meteora is a small 14th century icon of the Incredulity of Thomas (Fig. 7)[19]. Its iconography is fairly traditional, though brought up to date with Palaiologan architectural motifs and a dramatic emotional figure style[20]. But at the right of Christ, standing in among the apostles and behind Thomas himself, is a woman dressed in glorious red robes, a jewelled loros, and a crown. Christ's long arm stretches right over the head of Thomas to touch her forehead.

This bold lady, who is not named, has been identified as Maria Palaiologina, daughter of Symeon Uroš Palaiologos and wife of the despot of Ioannina, Thomas Preljubović. Thomas was assassinated in 1384; Maria herself died to 1394. According to Xyngopoulos, Thomas too can be spotted in this icon, but it is certainly Maria who dominates[21].

This icon, whose donor has arranged to make herself a participant in a Christological event is, as far as I know, unique in Byzantine art. To be sure, other important donors have been thought to have slipped themselves into sacred compositions: Kurt Weitzmann has seen the features of Constantine Porphyrogennitus in the figure of King Abgar on the 10th century Sinai Mandylion icon; Doula Mouriki has proposed seeing the features of emperor Constantine IX Monomachos, the patron of Nea Mone on Chios, in the face of Solomon in the 11th

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 23/03/2020 07:31:13 |

Fig. 6. Icon of the Virgin and her parents Joachim and Anna with a donor monk. Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine. (Published through the courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai).

century mosaic of the Anastasis in that church[22]. But these people are only inserting their faces. For a patron to walk straight into the holy scene, dressed in her own clothes, is something quite different.

It is not, to be sure, entirely without precedent in the strictly Byzantine tradition. On a 10th century ivory in Berlin, an unnamed bishop kneels beneath a scene of the Crucifixion; a miniature of the Last Judgement in the 11th century Studite Gospel Book in Paris, B.N. gr. 74 (f. 93v), the abbot for whom the manuscript was made and to whom various poems in it are addressed appears

18. Two of the earliest examples have presumably lost their donor figures, and so remain somewhat hypothetical. One is a fresco in the Southwest chapel at Hosios Loukas, where the figure of the donor has been effaced, but presumably drew the gesture and glance of Christ down to him at the lower left of the composition; on a 12th century marble relief in the Byzantine Museum in Athens, the gestures of both mother and child, which are not the usual ones of the Hodegetria, suggest that the panel, which is cut at the sides, may also have once included the figure of donor. Th. Chatzidakis-Bacharas, Les peintures murales de Hosios Loukas. Les chapelles occidentales, Athens 1982, p. 27-32, 89-97; Lange, Reliefikone (as in note 9 above), no. 13. See also M. Tatić-Djurić, La Vierge de la Vraie Esperance, symbole commun aux arts byzantins, géorgiens et slaves, ZLU 15 (1979), p. 71-92.

19. S. Cirac Estopañan, Bizancio y España. El legado de la basilissa Maria y de los déspotas Thomas y Esaú de Joannina, Barcelona 1934; A. Xyngopoulos, Νέαι προσωπογραφίαι τῆς Μαρίας Παλαιολογίνας καί τοῦ Θωμᾶ Πρελιούμποβιτς, ΔΧΑΕ Δ΄, Δ΄ (1964), p. 53-67. P. Mijović, O ikonama s portratima Tome Preljubovica i Marije Paleologove, ZLU 2 (1966), p. 185-194. The icon measures 38,5 × 27,5 cm.

20. There are twelve apostles, not the eleven that there should be, given the absence of Judas, but see the note below.

21. He is identified as the figure standing behind St. Thomas and Maria. However, the fact that this figure looks straight at the camera, so to speak, does not necessarily mean this is Thomas Preljubović masquerading as an apostle: such faces are common enough in the art of the region in the 14th century (cf. Nicholas Orphanos in Thessalonica and Markov Manastir, and the remarks of P. Mijović (as in note 19 above). The fact that there are twelve, instead of the usual eleven, apostles, is perhaps relevant, but, as Xyngopoulos has noted, there are roughly contemporary depictions of the Incredulity of Thomas with the full twelve (Xyngopoulos *op.cit.* (as in note 19 above), p. 56). On Thomas and Maria, cf. D. M. Nicol, The Despotate of Epiros 1267-1479, Cambridge 1984, esp. p. 139-156, and, most recently, C. Matanov, The Phenomenon Thomas Preljubović, Πρακτικά διεθνοῦς συμποσίου γιά τό Δεσποτᾶτο τῆς Ἠπείρου, Arta 1992, p. 63-68.

22. K. Weitzmann, Monastery of Saint Catherine (as in note 2 above), p. 96. D. Mouriki, The Mosaics of Nea Mone on Chios, Athens 1985, p. 137-138.

Fig. 7. Icon of the Incredulity of Thomas. Meteora, Monastery of the Metamorphosis.

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 23/03/2020 07:31:13 |

at the head of the line of his monks in Paradise itself, standing alongside the Virgin[23]. According to Mesarites' description of the mosaic decoration of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, the artist Eulalios depicted himself, in his own street clothes, "like a watchful guard" in the scene of the Three Maries before the Tomb[24]. Serbian rulers are depicted participating in the celebration of liturgical hymns such as the Akathistos and the Nativity hymns, though never apparently in actual Gospel events[25]. And Byzantine ekphrastic literature of all periods dwells upon the emotion a listener might feel were he actually present at the sacred event[26].

It has been proposed that the icon was commissioned by Maria in honor of her husband after his assassination on December 23, 1384[27]. The caption to the scene, «Η ψυλάφισις του Θωμά», "the touching of Thomas" instead of the more usual "the doors being closed," does tend to affirm a connection with her husband Thomas. But there are some problems with the traditional interpretation. Maria, unlike the lady from Kastoria on the St. George icon, is not clad in mourning. Is this because of her speedy remarriage, little over a month after her husband's death?[28] Or is there another explanation? Why does Christ so clearly favor Maria? His attention here is fixed not on Thomas, but on her; his arching gesture of benediction is every bit as important as that of Thomas' probing finger. Is this because of the magnitude of her donation?

The clue to the meaning of this icon lies in this gesture of Christ. Christ favors Maria over Thomas in accordance with his own words in the Bible: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20, 29). Dressed in a costume far removed in time from that of the apostles, Maria shows herself as one of those who were not present in that room, those who "have not seen, and yet have believed"; her faith, greater than that of Thomas or even the apostles themselves, is being recognized by Christ[29].

This icon should be seen, then, not merely in the context of the death of the despot Thomas Preljubović, but in relation to the well-attested piety of this couple during their lifetime. Together in 1375 they gave to the Great Lavra monastery the church they had founded and adorned at Vodena, along with its substantial collection of liturgical implements and books; together they commissioned two reliquary diptychs, one in Meteora, the other now in Cuenca, Spain; Thomas gave a chalice to Vatopedi and possibly an icon to Chilandari, and Maria in 1386 gave her uncle's staurothek to Meteora, where her brother, the monk John-Joasaph, was honored even then as the monastic complex's second founder[30]. The icon, though perhaps commissioned in honor of her husband, celebrates her faith, not the gift. Maria's presence on this icon is not the bold intrusion of an arrogant donor drawing attention to her donation and demanding a response from Christ, nor the fantasy of a wishful participant in a holy event. She belongs there: for Christ, as his words indicate, was thinking of people like her all along.

Cambridge, Mass.

23. Berlin ivory: O. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann, Die byzantinische Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.-XIII. Jahrhunderts, 2, Berlin 1934, rp. 1979, no. 102. Paris Gospels: Spatharakis, Portrait (as in note 1 above), fig. 31. On a 16th century icon of the Last Judgement at Phoini on Cyprus, a certain bishop Maximos appears next to the Virgin in Paradise, A. Papageorgiou, Byzantine Icons of Cyprus (Exhibition Catalogue, Benaki Museum), Athens 1976, no. 62.

24. "But our discourse... has recognized the man who with his own hand has depicted these things, as he may be seen standing upright by the Lord's tomb like a watchful guard, dressed in the same robe and other garments which he wore to adorn his outer appearance when he was living and painting these things...". Description of the Holy Apostles XXVIII: 23, trans. C. Mango, The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1972, p. 233. O. Demus has disputed the identity of the figure in this lost mosaic, and suggests the writer was actually seeing a figure of David, "The Sleepless Watcher": Ein Erklärungsversuch, JÖB 28 (1979), p. 241-245. But Eulalios would scarcely have been wearing the royal robes in which David is traditionally depicted.

25. For a useful compendium of this type of composition, cf. N. K. Moran, Singers in Late Byzantine and Slavonic Painting, Leiden 1986.

26. E. Fisher, Icon and Ekphrasis in Michael Psellos' Sermon on the Crucifixion, Byzantinoslavica (in press). I take this occasion to thank Professor Fisher for kindly sharing her article with me before its publication. See also H. Maguire, Art and Rhetoric in Byzantium, Princeton 1981.

27. Xyngopoulos, *op.cit.* (as in note 19 above), p. 61. According to Subotić, this was for the memorial services 40 days after his death, according to Mijović for those one year afterwards.

28. Her wedding to Esau Buondelmonte took place soon after January 31, 1385.

29. The theme is picked up in the 9th ode of the canon for orthros on the Sunday of Thomas: Σὲ τὸν ὡς θεὸν ἐκ τάφου, ἀναστάντα Χριστόν, οὐ βλεφάροις ἰδόντες, ἀλλὰ καρδίας πόθῳ πεπιστευκότες ἐν ὕμνοις μεγαλύνομεν.

30. G. Subotić, Δῶρα καί δωρέες τοῦ δεσπότη Θωμᾶ καί τῆς βασίλισσας Μαρίας Παλαιολογίνας, Πρακτικά διεθνοῦς συμποσίου γιά τό Δεσποτᾶτο τῆς 'Ηπείρου, Arta 1992, p. 69-86. Th. Papazotos, 'Ο Θωμᾶς Πρελιούμποβιτς καί ἡ Μαρία Παλαιολογίνα, κτήτορες του ναοῦ τῆς Παναγίας Γαβαλλιώτισσας στά Βοδενά, Κληρονομία 13:2 (1981), p. 509-516. N. Radošević and G. Subotić, Bogorodica Gavaliotisa u Vodenu, ZRVI 27/28 (1989), p. 217-254 (with extended French summary). On the reliquaries, Maria is depicted in proskynesis before a huge figure of the Virgin, in a much more traditional donor composition. The written donation documents of this couple, however, also exhibit certain unofficial, personal characteristics, L. Mavromatis, A propos des liens de dépendence en Épire à la fin du XIVe siècle, ZRVI 19 (1980), p. 275-281.

http://epublishing.ekt.gr | e-Publisher: EKT | Downloaded at 23/03/2020 07:31:13 |